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ABSTRACT

This research assesses the ways the young-old differ in attitudes. As part of a larger study, data were collected by personal interview with 224 people aged 55 to 74, and 42 persons aged 75 and over living in an urban center and a rural county in Kentucky. Each person responded to 72 agree-disagree statements constituting 24 attitude scales about economic well-being, self-image, morale, community life, family relationships, and general outlook. In both urban and rural samples the young-old reported more favorable socioeconomic conditions than the old-old. In the rural area slight differences were found between the attitudes of the young-old by a ration of 5.5 to one. Several hypotheses are suggested to explain the more favorable attitudes found among the old-old in the metropolitan center. (Author)

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ATTITUDES: YOUNG-OLD AND OLD-OLD

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Existing literature in social gerontology suggests that age groups in industrialized societies are becoming increasingly differentiated, a phenomenon that provides a structural base for major social changes and adjustments (Riley, et al., 1972). A relatively new and meaningful age division has occurred in the United States among older persons. Those aged 55 to 74 have been designated the young-old and those 75 and over are called the old-old (Neugarten 1974, 1975). Data on these two age groups in various settings of the country would be useful to program planners. In a short time the young-old will become the old-old and they will carry with them many of their psychological and social characteristics.

This paper focuses on subjective aspects of well-being as reflected in the attitudes of young-old and old-old persons living in two communities in the United States -- one a rural county in the Southern Appalachian Region and the other a metropolitan center located just outside the Region. The general hypothesis examined is that the young-old would reveal a more favorable subjective life than the old-old people. Answers are sought to two questions. (1) In what ways do the young-old and the old-old in the two communities differ in their attitudes? (2) What implications do the findings have for theory and practice in social gerontology? Information relevant to these questions should be useful to groups and organizations involved in planning future programs for older persons in the two communities.

METHODS

In 1971, data were collected by personal interview with representative samples of men and women aged 20 and over living in a rural county of the Southern Appalachian Region and in a metropolitan center located just outside the Region. The urban center had a population of about 160,000 and the rural county had a population of about 6,500. The samples drawn included 266 persons aged 55 and over who constituted the respondents in the following report. Among them were 98 young-old and 28 old-old in the urban center and 126 young-old and 14 old-old in the rural county. The 266 respondents included 172 women and 94 men, and the ratio of women to men was somewhat greater in the urban center than in the rural area.

As might be expected, the young-old persons were more advantaged socially and economically than the old-old. In both urban and rural samples, the young-old, compared with the old-old, included a larger proportion of married persons, reported higher annual incomes, and possessed fewer health ailments. One quarter of the young-old but none of the old-old were in the labor force. In the urban sample, the educational levels of the young-old and old-old were approximately equal, but in the rural sample the young-old had received more formal education than the old-old. The respondents were almost entirely of the Protestant faith. A greater proportion of the rural than of the urban sample was born in Kentucky and on a farm (Table 1).

As used in this paper, the term "attitude" refers to a complex of knowledge, beliefs, notions, convictions, and values by which a person expresses ways of looking at things and situations (Anderson, 1964). Attitudes were assessed by presenting each respondent with 72 statements constituting 24 scales on attitudes about self, morale, and outlook,

and about family, economic, and community conditions. The three statements in each scale were designed to run in either a "positive" or "negative" direction (see Appendix). Respondents gave an "agree", a "don't know", or a "disagree" answer to each statement. These responses were scored three, two, and one, respectively, permitting a mean score range from three to nine for each set. Intercorrelations among statements on each scale ranged from 0.73 to 0.96, indicating that the items did assess a common underlying dimension. In the following analysis, one-tailed statistical tests were used because of the directional nature of the hypotheses. The significance of difference between any two mean attitudinal scores was computed by using the T-test (Mueller, et al., 1970, 410-416). A statistically significant higher mean score on a positive scale and a statistically significant lower mean score on a negative scale have been designated "favorable" scores.

FINDINGS

In the metropolitan center, substantial differences were found between the attitude scores of the young-old and old-old persons. Comparisons of mean scores on the 24 attitude scales yielded 13 statistically significant differences between the two urban age groups. Of these 13 statistically significant differences in mean scale scores, the old-old persons scored more favorably than the young-old on eleven, and the young-old scored more favorably than the old-old on only two, resulting in an overall ratio favoring the old-old of 5.5 to one (Table 2).

In the rural community only slight differences were found between the attitude scores of the young-old and the old-old. Comparisons of

mean scores on the 24 attitude scales revealed only four statistically significant differences between the two rural age groups. Of these four statistically significant differences in mean scale scores, the young-old scored more favorably than the old-old on three, and the old-old scored more favorably than the young-old on one.

The category of attitude scales yielding the greatest disparity between young-old and old-old persons in the urban center was that assessing subjective economic deprivation. This category attempted to measure the respondents' attitudes about financial worry, about the condition of their housing, and about their felt need for more money. On each of the three attitude scales in this category the old-old persons in the metropolitan center made the more favorable score. Old-old urban persons, compared with the young-old urban persons, worried less about their financial condition, revealed greater satisfaction with their housing, and maintained that they had less need for more money.

In the rural county only one of the three attitude scales assessing subjective economic deprivation yielded statistically significant differences between the young-old and the old-old. The old-old persons in the rural area revealed significantly more dissatisfaction with their housing conditions than did the young-old rural residents. No statistically significant differences were found between the two rural age groups in their attitudes about financial worry or the need for more money.

The morale of the old-old urban persons was somewhat higher than that of the young-old urban respondents. This subjective state was assessed by means of four attitude scales which attempted to measure :

feelings of pessimism, a sense of dreariness, a feeling of emptiness, and general happiness. On two of these four scales the old-old urban persons made a more favorable score than did the urban young-old's. The old-old's, compared with the young-old's, found their lives less dreary and reported less emptiness in their lives. No significant differences were found between the two urban age groups in attitudes registering pessimism or general happiness.

The young-old rural people revealed slightly higher morale than did the old-old persons in the rural county. Only one of the four attitude scales assessing morale yielded statistically significant differences between the two age groups in the rural county. The young-old rural people scored significantly higher on the general happiness scale than did the old-old respondents in the rural county. Comparisons of mean scale scores yielded no statistically significant differences between the rural young-old and old-old on attitudes reflecting a sense of pessimism, dreariness, or emptiness.

Old-old urban respondents revealed somewhat more favorable attitudes about their communities than did the urban young-old people. Community evaluation was assessed by means of four scales, one on satisfaction with visiting patterns, one on the degree of neighborliness in the community, one on a rating of the neighborhood as a place in which to live, and a fourth on a general evaluation of their communities. The old-old urbanites scored more favorably than the young-old urban dwellers on two of the four community scales. The old-old persons, compared

with the young-old, revealed more favorable attitudes regarding visiting patterns and general community evaluation. No significant differences were found between the attitude scores of the urban old-old and young-old on neighborliness and on the rating given to their neighborboods.

In the rural county only one of the four attitude scales evaluating community life yielded statistically significant differences between the young-old and the old-old. The old-old rural persons gave a more favorable rating to their neighborhoods than did the rural young-old people. On the three remaining attitude scales evaluating visiting patterns, neighborliness, and community life no statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores of the young-old and old-old in the rural county.

In general outlook the old-old persons in the metropolitan center scored more favorably than the urban young-old by a ratio of two to one. Four scales assessed general outlook: attitudes about religion, about the use of time, about personal gratification, and attitudes reflecting a sense of failure. Old-old urban persons revealed stronger feelings of personal gratification and less pronounced feelings of failure than did the young-old urban men and women. In contrast, the young-old urban dwellers revealed more positive attitudes about the use of time than did the old-old urbanites. One general outlook scale -- that assessing religious convictions -- yielded no statistically significant difference between the young-old and the old-old in the metropolitan center.

In the rural area no statistically significant differences were found between the young-old and old-old persons in attitudes reflecting a general outlook on life. Young-old and old-old persons in the rural county revealed very similar attitudes about religion, about the use of time, about personal gratification, and about a sense of failure in life.

The urban old-old persons revealed a slightly more favorable self-image than did the urban young-old. Self-image was identified from responses to four attitude scales -- one included statements about a positive self-image, another about a negative image, a third revealed a positive self-rating of health condition, and a fourth a negative rating of health. On one scale -- that assessing a negative self-image -- the old-old urban people made a more favorable score than did the urban young-old persons. On the remaining three scales assessing self-image, no statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores of the urban old-old and the urban young-old.

The rural young-old persons reported a slightly more favorable self-image than did the rural old-old people. On one of the four scales assessing self-image -- that which attempted to measure a positive self-rating of health condition -- the young-old rural people made a more favorable score than did the old-old rural respondents. No statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores of the rural young-old and rural old-old on the scales assessing a positive or a negative self-image or on the scale assessing negative health.

Favorable attitudes about family life were equally distributed between the young-old and the old-old in the metropolitan center. Five scales constituted the family attitude category. These were designed to assess family pride, family support, family rejection, family worry, and satisfaction with childhood. The urban young-old persons reported less family rejection than did the urban old-old, but the old-old persons in the metropolitan community revealed a stronger identification with their families than did the urban young-old. No statistically significant differences were found between the mean attitude scores of the urban young-old and the urban old-old persons on the scales measuring family pride, family worry, and happiness in childhood.

In the rural county no statistically significant differences were found between the young-old and old-old persons in attitudes about family life. Similar attitudes were revealed by the two rural age groups concerning family pride, family support and rejection, family worry, and happiness in childhood.

IMPLICATIONS

The foregoing data have a number of implications for theory and practice in social gerontology. The findings in the urban center do not support existing theory. It was expected that the young-old by virtue of their younger years and more desirable social and economic conditions would reveal the more favorable attitudes. The decidedly more favorable attitudes among the old-old than among the young-old

in the urban center add to the accumulating literature that late life may be associated with a favorable psychological outlook (Maas and Kuypers, 1974).

Several hypotheses may be suggested to explain the attitudinal findings in the urban center. One concerns survival. Perhaps the old-old persons interviewed in the urban center represent the psychological elite of their age cohort. Their positive psychological outlook may have been an important factor in their survival. Generational and adjustment hypotheses may also be relevant. The young-old in the urban center may reflect the attitudes of younger persons who make strong demands upon their social-environmental conditions. When these demands are not fulfilled to a satisfactory degree, the young-old persons may report negative attitudes. In contrast, the old-old in the metropolitan center may have made adjustments to their life conditions. They may have been accustomed to rather meager rewards throughout their lives and they may be relatively content with what they have in late life. These adjustments may be reflected in favorable attitudes.

The findings in the urban center carry some implications for future programs for the aged in that community. The young-old will become the old-old in the near future, and they will carry with them many of their present attitudes and expectations. When the present young-old become the old-old they undoubtedly will be less content than the present generation of old-old persons. They will probably make greater demands upon their community for opportunities and services. It might be wise for organizations in the metropolitan center to be cognizant of this emerging trend in planning programs for the future.

The attitudinal findings in the rural county tend to support existing theory. The young-old did report more favorable attitudes than the old-old. The small number of attitude scale scores that differed significantly between the two rural age groups suggest some characteristics of the rural culture that may have implications for developing aging programs in that regions. Studies of life in the Southern Appalachian Region of the United States have revealed the strong homogeneous folk character of the culture (Ford, 1962; Walls and Stephenson, 1972). Apparently it is a society less stratified and less segmented by age than urban areas. It appears that "old-age characteristics" may set in during later middle age and remain fairly constant into later old age. It may be inferred that programs and services developed for persons of later middle age in the rural county may be suitable for persons of advanced old age.

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APPENDIX: ATTITUDE SCALES

1. Positive Image. Most people think I am more friendly than others my age. If I make promises, I always carry them out. I am sure my appearance is better than others my age. 2. Negative Image. Sometimes I feel as though I am not much good. I wish I had more confidence in myself. All things considered, I feel that I am a failure. 3. Positive Health. My health is good enough for me to do all the things I want to. My health is much better than people my own age. I have perfect health. 4. Negative Health. I worry more about my health than I used to. I sometimes wish I were in better health. I would like to have more health care than I am getting now. 5. Pessimism.[1] Nowadays, a person has to live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself. In spite of what some people say, the life of the average man today is getting worse, not better. It is hardly fair to bring children into the world the way things look for the future. 6. Dreariness. My life could be happier than it is now. Most of the things I do are rather dull. This is the dreariest time of my life. 7. Emptiness. I feel my life could be more useful. I don't know what to do with my free time. I wish I could get more things done each day. 8. Happiness. This is the happiest time of my life. If I could live my life over again, I would live it exactly the same way. Taking all things into account, I think I am as happy as most people my age. 9. Religious. My religion helps me solve many of my problems. I get a great deal of comfort out of my religion. In the final analysis, my religion is the only thing I can really count on. 10. Time. I get upset if I don't have several things planned each day. I have many ideas about exciting

[1]Adapted from Srole (1956)

activities for the next month. I expect interesting and pleasant things to happen to me in the future. 11. Gratification. As I look at my life today, I am more than satisfied with it. I have gotten pretty much what I expect out of life. I have everything I need to make me happy. 12. Failure. If I could live my life over again, I would do things differently. I often get tired of trying to do the right thing. Some days I don't think life is worth living. 13. Family Pride. My parents were much more successful in life than I will ever be. I am pleased that my relatives have turned out so well. When I was a child, I felt that my family was much better off than other families I knew. 14. Family Support. I know I can always count on help from my family if I really need it. I always ask advice of my family before making any decisions. My greatest happiness in life comes from my family. 15. Family Rejection. Friends are more important to me than relatives. Most families have a lot of arguments. Sometimes I feel my family could get along without me. 16. Family Worry. I worry more about my family than other people my age. My relatives cause me a lot of worry. Family problems are my greatest worry at the present time. 17. Childhood. Without a doubt, my childhood was the happiest time of my life. When I was a child, I had all the things I wanted. As a child, I was as happy as other children I played with. 18. Financial worry. I worry a lot about family finances. I think my family spends too much money on foolish things. I wish we could save more money each month. 19. Housing. I wish I had a better house to live in. This house always has something that needs fixing. This house needs major repairs. 20. Need Money. I wish I had more

opportunities to earn money. I have to go without some things because I don't have enough money. I would be a lot happier if I had more money. 21. Visiting. I would like to spend more time visiting with people. I wish I had more close friends. I would like to know my neighbors better. 22. Neighborliness. I would like to take part in more social activities. I wish people would visit me more often. Life would be more enjoyable if people were more neighborly. 23. Good Neighborhood. This neighborhood is an ideal place to live in. The people in this neighborhood are real friendly. I can find all the things I want to do in this neighborhood. 24. Community Not Good. I think I would be happier if I moved to a different community. The main trouble with this community is lack of things to do. This would be a better community if people were more friendly.

Table 1. Social and Economic Characteristics of Young-Old and Old-Old Persons in an Urban and a Rural Area of Kentucky: 1971.

Characteristic	Urban		Rural	
N	Young-Old* (98)	Old-Old* (28)	Young-Old (126)	Old-Old (14)
Sex	%	%	%	%
Male	26	25	45	36
Female	74	75	54	64
Religion				
Protestant	90	89	90	100
Other	10	11	10	0
Born in Kentucky				
Yes	74	82	96	100
No	26	18	4	0
Born on Farm				
Yes	46	61	86	100
No	54	39	14	0
Marital Status				
Married	40	25	67	43
Single	60	75	33	57
Health Ailments				
None	37	21	29	14
1 to 4	32	42	26	36
5 or more	31	36	45	50
Work Status				
Working	26	0	25	0
Keeping house	35	32	39	57
Retired	36	64	34	36
Other	3	4	2	7
Education				
0-5 years	10	11	28	50
6-11 years	38	36	52	43
12-14 years	38	32	13	7
15 and over	14	21	7	0
Income				
Under $500	15	14	15	21
$500 - 1,999	30	57	44	79
$2,000 - 5,999	35	18	31	0
$6,000 and over	20	11	10	0

Young-old = Aged 55-74
Old-old = Aged 75 and over

Table 2. Mean Attitude Scale Scores of Young-Old and Old-Old Persons in an Urban and a Rural Area of Kentucky: 1971.

		Urban				Rural			
		Y-O* (98)	O-O* (28)	t	P	Y-O (126)	O-O (14)	t	P
Self-image									
Positive image	+	7.35	7.36	-0.04		7.26	7.43	-0.58	
Negative image	-	5.65	5.07	1.80	*	6.32	6.71	-0.68	
Positive health	+	6.06	5.50	1.22		5.83	4.57	2.71	**
Negative health	-	6.31	6.57	-0.60		6.83	7.64	-1.28	
Morale									
Pessimism	-	6.29	6.21	0.16		6.94	6.50	1.10	
Dreariness	-	5.49	4.11	3.73	***	5.81	6.07	-0.41	
Emptiness	-	6.34	5.46	3.02	**	6.64	6.07	1.27	
Happiness	+	6.16	6.50	-1.02		6.56	5.79	1.73	*
Outlook									
Religious	+	8.24	8.04	0.56		8.28	8.43	-0.32	
Time	+	6.21	5.50	2.21	*	5.90	5.64	0.70	
Gratification	+	6.65	7.71	-2.47	**	7.34	7.00	0.79	
Failure	-	5.61	4.68	2.44	**	5.63	5.79	-0.37	
Family									
Pride	+	6.36	6.86	-1.55		6.48	6.50	-0.06	
Support	+	7.12	7.79	-1.78	*	7.80	7.79	0.03	
Rejection	-	5.82	6.36	-1.70	*	6.13	6.93	-1.31	
Worry	-	4.71	4.11	1.54		5.67	6.50	-1.34	
Childhood	+	6.11	6.31	-1.17		6.63	6.71	-0.23	
Economic									
Financial worry	-	5.52	4.32	3.86	***	6.02	6.07	-0.08	
Housing	-	5.12	4.18	2.74	**	6.37	7.36	-1.74	*
Need money	-	6.09	4.43	3.67	***	6.79	6.43	0.63	
Community									
Visiting	-	6.35	5.36	2.26	*	6.93	6.93	0.00	
Neighborliness	-	5.94	6.25	-0.65		6.96	6.79	0.27	
Good neighborhood	+	7.37	7.36	0.02		8.03	8.57	-1.88	*
Community not good	-	4.72	4.14	1.83	*	5.45	5.21	0.40	

Y-O = Aged 55-74

O-O = Aged 75 and over

One-tailed test

* $P <$ 0.05

** $P <$ 0.01

*** $P <$ 0.001

FOOTNOTES

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